**10 Commandments of PowerPoint**

**Thou Shalt Not Read The Slides**

I can read. I really can. I don’t need you to get up and read me exactly what’s on the screen behind you. Use slides as a jumping-off point for other things, or as the most general, basic introduction imaginable. Whatever’s on the slides, let me read it. Don’t read it to me, or you risk coming off as if you’ve got no idea what you’re talking about.

**Thou Shalt Use 15 Words Per Slide**

There’s absolutely no reason to ever have more than a few words on a slide. Think of it like a text message, or like [Twitter](http://www.twitter.com/) – if you can’t get your message across in 15 words, shorten your message. Slides with novels written on them do one of two things: they keep me from paying attention to you, because I’m too busy reading, or they make me not care, because there’s just too much to follow.

Use 15 words per slide, and hopefully a lot fewer. Remember that you’re giving the presentation, not your slides.

**Thou Shalt Not Only Use Text**

Pictures say a thousand words, and videos are usually a lot more interesting than you are. Give me images, movie clips, sound bites – anything to vary the tempo and feel of the presentation. It looks good on you, because you’ve done your preparation, and it’s much more interesting to watch and listen to.

**Thou Shalt Not Bullet**

The text you *do* use should never, ever be bulleted. Think like a graphic designer, and use colors, fonts, and spacing to make your presentation more appealing to the eye. A bulleted list looks like something I’m not going to want to read, but a colorful, cleverly designed presentation is both easier and more compelling to follow.

PowerPoint templates, too, are almost always terrible. Avoid them at all costs – make your presentation, *your* presentation.

**Thou Shalt Not Say “I’m Going to Talk About”**

This is more of a personal pet peeve than anything else, but the single fastest way to make me mentally check out of your presentation is to say “I’m going to talk about X, Y, and Z.” I don’t care – just start talking about them. If your presentation is any good, I’m pretty sure I’ll figure out what exactly it is that you’re talking about. The less introduction and setup you do, the better: jump in to what I’m actually going to care about.

**Thou Shalt Not Over-Clutter**

This is a tough one, and has to be balanced with the bulleting commandment. Images are great – 17 per slide is not. Generally speaking, give me one or two things to focus on per slide, whether it’s a point of text or an image. Three is okay, as long as they’re all simple and closely related.

If I have to look at 300 pictures over the course of your presentation, unless they’re all related to one thing, it’s going to be impossible to remember everything, whether I want to or not.

**Thou Shalt Not Over-Use Transitions**

Transitions (the animations between slides, and when you bring text in) really ought to be deleted from PowerPoint. They don’t add anything to the presentations except a feeling for the presenter like they really know what they’re doing in the application. All it does for me is add time to a presentation that’s probably already too long.

No transitions ever, ever, ever. If you think “I need to have my individual letters flying in from off the screen!” just quit right then. Or at least call me and tell me not to come to your presentation.

**Thou Shalt Not Script Anything**

Even if you’re not reading a slide, it’s terrible to listen to someone who’s obviously just reading off a script. There’s a subtle difference between preparing and scripting, and it’s an important one. You should, you must, be prepared – know your subject backward and forward.

You shouldn’t, however, stand in front of me and read word for word what you’ve written. Memorizing a script is fine, but it’s abundantly clear when you’re only thinking one word ahead. Know your subject, and talking about it will be both easier and more interesting.

**Thou Shalt Know Less is More**

There’s a fascinating conference every year called the TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) talks, which has a great rule of thumb: you get 18 minutes. Talk about whatever you want, but you’re done after 18 minutes. Frankly, these people are much more important than I am, so if they can be held to 18 minutes, I ought to do my thing in about 3.

The key to a good presentation, in reality, is how short it is. Don’t ramble, or add unnecessary information; in fact, do the opposite. A presentation that’s too short, and leaves people wanting more, is far better than a long one that makes me wish you’d be struck by lightning.

**Thou Shalt Rehearse**

Before you give your presentation, open the file. Make sure everything’s okay. Fun fact: things go wrong sometimes. If it can be avoided, don’t let it be a surprise that you get to share with the audience.

Think of it as a sound-check at a concert – you’re making sure everything’s set up right, and that it will go smoothly when everyone’s watching. Give the whole presentation in your practice run – it’ll make it better-sounding and better-timed when you’re doing it for real.

PowerPoint isn’t a particularly tough animal, and is a simple application to use. The people who use it, however, are a totally different story. Let’s try and fix that – for all our sakes.

Taken from <http://www.digitizd.com/2009/05/11/the-10-commandments-of-powerpoint/>